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The everyday prophets are in our midst

Thomas Gumbleton | Jul. 12, 2012 The Peace Pulpit

Most of us probably do not remember our Baptism because, of course, we were almost all of us infants when we were baptized, but there is a very important part of that ceremony of Baptism that we should reflect on regularly. After the priest has poured the water on the person to be baptized, and through that beautiful symbol has taken that person through being buried in the death of Jesus, and rising to new life in Jesus, after that the priest, deacon or minister anoints the person with holy chrism, and says, ?As Jesus was anointed Priest, Prophet and King, so may you live always as a member of His body.?

In other words, may you be priest, prophet and king like Jesus. If we listen to today?s readings, we?ll learn something about especially that role of prophet. Not many of us would think of ourselves as being called to be prophets, but in fact, we are. It?s part of our carrying on the work of Jesus who was a prophet. We think of Jesus as a wonderworker, the healer, the compassionate, the healing person who has drawn all people through Himself through love, but we don?t think very often of Jesus the Prophet.

Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Ezekiel 2:2-5
Psalms 123:1-2, 2, 3-4
2 Corinthians 12:7-10
Mark 6:1-6
Full text of the readings [1]

Today, we will explore that and see what it means for Him and other prophets, and for us who are called through our Baptism, to be prophets. First of all, we ask ourselves what is a prophet? Sometimes, I suppose, we?re caught up with the idea that a prophet is someone who predicts the future, who can foresee what is going to come in the future. That really isn?t what we mean by a prophet, by those God calls to be prophets. It has nothing to do with predicting the future. A prophet is one who speaks on behalf of God.

That is what a prophet does. A prophet is called to be one who speaks as God speaks, bringing the message of God into our world, into the human family, into our lives. Clearly, that is what Jesus did. In our first lesson today, however, we also look at other prophets like Ezekiel. This lesson that we heard from the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel tells about the time when the chosen people had refused to listen to another prophet, Jeremiah, who had warned them against entering into military alignment with other nations and carrying on war.

They refused to listen. They got caught up in a war and they were totally defeated. It was a disaster. Jerusalem was overwhelmed and destroyed. The people were carried off into exile, and Ezekiel was carried off with them. He was inspired, filled with God?s spirit, to be a prophet in their midst, trying to help them to understand how they had gone wrong, to repent of their evil, to come back to God. Ezekiel was sent to preach to them. This incident shows us something that is so important, that God will always send a prophet.

As we hear at the end of that lesson, God is faithful to God?s love for God?s people, and will always send a prophet to speak for God to draw the people back to God. Sometimes, the people will not listen, and so, we hear God saying through Ezekiel, ?I will always send the prophet, and they will know that a prophet has spoken in their midst, even if they refuse.? If the people are unfaithful, God always remains faithful, and always preaches to us through His prophets.

Of course, there have been other prophets. John the Baptist -- Jesus said about him, ?What did you go out into

the desert to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, more than a prophet.? John the Baptist was the one who spoke on behalf of God, and Jesus said about John the Baptist, ?No greater person among all of humankind. There is no greater person than John the Baptist who was a great prophet speaking on behalf of God.

Jesus comes into the midst of God?s people, into the midst of the human family to be the Prophet who not only speaks on behalf of God, but whose very presence, whose very life, whose very being is a message about God, a message enabling us to know God deeply by knowing Jesus. He is the Prophet that is God. Now all of us are also called to be prophets, and we must understand as Ezekiel did, that people may not listen. They may reject the prophet. Surely, that?s what we see happening in Nazareth.

The people couldn?t take Jesus as a Prophet. They were happy to see Him do some healing, and they thought of Him as a wonder worker, but for Him to speak on behalf of God, who is He? He?s a carpenter. They spoke in a very derogatory way about Jesus. ?We know His family. They?re nobody. Why is He putting Himself up?? So they reject Him. Jesus, as Mark says, is astounded at the hardness of their hearts, and because they are not able to be open to Him, open to God, God?s love can?t touch them. So Jesus decides to leave there, but a Prophet has been in their midst as God promised.

As we look at the world around us and not only in the past, but in the present, too, we know that there have been many prophets whom God has sent. I suggest a couple that we?re probably very familiar with. I think everyone knows Mother Teresa. She was a prophet, not so much by what she said. She didn?t go around preaching, but her very life exemplified God?s love that includes everybody, especially the poor, the rejected, those that are thrust aside almost as worthless. She went among them. She brought healing -- not so much physical healing.

She did that by bringing the sisters into their midst and bringing that healing love of God, but her very life spoke God?s love for God?s people, that our God is a God of love who reaches out to all of us, but especially to the poor, the most rejected. That?s a powerful message about God that Mother Teresa preached by her very life. I also bring to your attention another woman prophet: Dorothy Day. She is not as well known as Mother Teresa, but one who has had a significant impact on the Church, especially in our country.

Some people would claim that Dorothy Day has been, in the history of the Church in the United States, the most outstanding of prophets. She started an organization or community, the Catholic Worker Community, people who live the radical teachings of the Gospel, who go among the poor and live among them, welcoming the poor into their homes through houses of hospitality, and who try to transform our world into the Reign of God by bringing the message of Jesus into our world.

One of the things that Dorothy Day did that was not well known, during the Second Vatican Council, when the Bishops at the Council were discussing the part of the document on the Church in the modern world about war and peace, she together with some others, met with a number of bishops and helped to influence their thinking about the need to issue a declaration condemning weapons of mass destruction. It?s the only place in all of the Vatican Council, in the document of the Church in the modern world, where there is a condemnation of weapons of mass destruction as being something totally evil that never could be justified.

That was prophecy, a God message proclaimed through the help of Dorothy Day and the others who were with her, but now through the Bishops of the world teaching, prophesying, speaking on behalf of God, giving us this message that we must turn away from war, and especially wars that bring about the destruction of innocent human lives. We must turn away from that. It?s a powerful message. I think that here, too, we discover for the most part we haven?t really been listening: not enough to Mother Teresa and not enough to Dorothy Day and the bishops of Vatican II.

We still find ourselves in a world where there are a vast majority of poor people who are neglected and pushed aside and ignored. In our own country, it?s getting to be a larger and larger number, while a few are getting

richer and richer. We find ourselves embroiled in acts of violence and war, and the use of weapons that kill so many innocent people. So prophecy is still something that God is using. God is speaking to us through prophets, but like the people in Nazareth, like the people in exile in Babylonia, we do not listen well enough.

That is one of the things that we must reflect on today as we are instructed on prophets and prophecy, and our role as baptized members of the Body of Christ, to be a prophet as He. We must listen and reflect on do we listen? Are we really trying to hear God?s Word proclaimed by the prophets who are in our midst today, those who in some special way are proclaiming God?s word and the radical teachings of Jesus? Are we listening? Then, also, are we being the prophets we?re called to be?

Most of us would not think of ourselves as going out and preaching, proclaiming God?s Word from the housetops, so to speak, but we can do it in the way Mother Teresa did it: through our lives. We can be what we might call everyday prophets. As you heard at the beginning of the Liturgy today, my brother is dying. He probably will be dead within a matter of hours, at the most a couple of days, and as I reflect on his life, the life of his wife and their life together, I think of them and I?m hesitant to speak about my own family, but I feel close to all of you in this parish, so I feel like I can share in this way.

It?s sort of like St. Paul in the second lesson today. He didn?t really want to speak about himself, but he felt to his closest friends at Corinth he could open up his heart and speak about what was really in him. So in that way, I speak about my brother and his wife. This summer, they have completed 60 years of married life, really proclaiming God?s Word of love, which is what married people are called to do, to show that covenant love of God for God?s people, a love that is without limit, a love that is unconditional, a love that embraces all.

For 60 years, my brother and his wife have exemplified that love. Their children, seven of them and their spouses, and their children, they are a beautiful family, with the children and grandchildren experiencing the love of my brother and his wife, and being influenced by that love. They themselves are able to carry on this message of God?s love. So I think of my brother and his wife as everyday prophets. They heard the Word of God. They understood that the one commandment, ?Love one another as I have loved you,? that they must live that commandment, and they have.

They are what I would call everyday prophets, and they are listened to by their children and grandchildren. It?s something beautiful when it happens like that. All of us are called to be prophets. We hear the Word of God. We hear Jesus proclaiming, ?Love one another as I have loved you. There is no greater love than this: to lay down your life for your friend,? and even to love your enemies -- we?ve all heard that message. We see it lived out by others around us who have been prophets in our midst.

So today, we must ask ourselves, are we going to leave this Church and understand more clearly that we are called to be a prophet, to follow Jesus the Prophet? We must pray that God will give us the ability to proclaim God?s Word wherever we are, not necessarily and most often not in words, but just to proclaim God?s way of love by the way we live out the Word of God.

[Homily given at St. Hilary, Redford, Mich.]

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